



## **A Naming Strategy for Montana State Park Properties**

A presentation to the Montana State Parks and Recreation Board

October 2016

The Montana State Park system is comprised of 54 units with varying resource types, recreation experience opportunities, and levels of development. Currently, all properties within the Montana State Park system are referred to as State Parks.

Goal A of the 2015 Strategic Plan required that the division manage significant, relevant and accessible parks in a manner that is consistent with available resources. As part of meeting that goal, the Montana State Parks and Recreation Board passed the Classification and Prioritization Policy in December 2015. Directive 2 of the policy instructs MSP to develop a naming strategy for MSP properties that is consistent with Classification and to present this strategy to the Montana State Parks Board.

The primary purpose of the naming strategy is to align visitor expectations with the experience opportunities of a particular site through the use of appropriate site names. Currently, all properties actively managed by Montana State Parks are called State Parks, but the system is diverse and offers a range of experiences to our visitors. The division realizes that visitors may be looking for natural experiences, opportunities to learn about Montana's history and culture, exciting recreation opportunities, overnight accommodations, or well developed modern facilities and comfort amenities. Montana State Parks provides all of those experiences, but they are not all available at each site.

According to the 2015 Montana State Parks Classification and Prioritization of Resources policy, only those properties that meet the brand promise of significance, relevance, and accessibility will carry the name of state parks. To better align visitor expectations with site conditions, other properties within the system will be renamed.

Prior to developing the naming strategy, the team conducted an analysis of naming structures for state park systems throughout the United States. The team found that three types of properties were consistently found in all park systems: recreation, natural, and heritage with the name of

state park being assigned to those properties that were the best examples within a system of one or more of these types.

The 2015 Montana State Parks Classification team used similar criteria for evaluating the significance of sites within the Montana State Park System. Using these measures of significance, all properties were placed within one of each of these categories based upon their highest level of significance. This provided the team with a first sort of all properties where all properties fell into one of the above listed categories.

For a site to be elevated to the “State Park” Category, it was required to meet the brand promise of (statewide) significance, relevance, and accessibility. In addition, state parks serve as destination areas and may have federal or state designations, high levels of resource integrity, protected view sheds, and higher levels of development for visitor access and comfort.

As a result of the process, the team proposes the following site designations: State Park, State Heritage Site, State Recreation Area, and State Natural Area. The State Park designation is comprised of properties in Class 1 (with two exceptions: Milltown and Lone Pine). The other designations contain properties from Classes 2 through 4. Cooney Reservoir and Tongue River Reservoir (both class 1a) serve as the exception and are included within the State Recreation Area designation where they were determined to more naturally fit.

The level of development, resource allocation, and promotion of sites within each designation will be determined through the implementation of the Classification and Prioritization of Resources Policy. Those properties with the lowest levels of significance, relevance, and accessibility (Class 4) will be least promoted within the system and will have a reduced presence in marketing efforts including the MSP website, brochures, and signage.

Additionally, an “undesignated property” category was created for those parks that may not yet fit within a specific designation due to the lack of a management plan or the development of visitor amenities. The description of each designation is listed below:

**State Parks** represent the most significant natural, scenic, historic, cultural, scientific, or recreational legacy of Montana’s heritage and, as such, often serve as destination areas for visitors. They provide for the use, enjoyment, and understanding of park resource with highly relevant and accessible experiences.

**State Heritage Sites** commemorate persons, notable events, historic periods, or cultures and provide opportunities for visitors to connect with and experience Montana’s historic and cultural heritage.

**State Recreation Areas** provide high quality recreation experiences through access to natural resources, and compatible amenities. Visitors will have opportunities to relax, relieve stress, or seek challenges through outdoor exploration, skill development, or physical activity.

**State Natural Areas** provide for the enjoyment and understanding of ecosystems, landscapes, and other notable natural features.

**Undesignated Property** Any site under the jurisdiction of the department that is not designated, operated, or maintained as a state park, recreation area, natural area, or heritage site. A site is considered an Undesignated Property if the site is newly acquired, transferred, donated, or brought into the system in a manner consistent with the Land Acquisition Policy until such time that a proposal to designate the site is considered by the Division.